



Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme



The COMESA Green Pass and Commodity-based Trade in Livestock Products

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The COMESA Green Pass is a system of certification to support trade in agricultural commodities. It is believed that the Green Pass will open the way to high value markets by guaranteeing the safety and quality of the commodity. Trade in livestock commodities faces particular challenges posed by the relatively higher threat to human health of animal-derived food and the fact that international standards for their trade are based on geographical freedom from diseases endemic to the region. Commodity-based trade supported by the Green Pass holds the key to unlock the door to high value markets.

Commodity-based trade – how does it work?

Commodity-based trade (CBT) is based on the principle that livestock commodities and products (meat, milk and their derivatives) can be rendered safe in terms of human and animal health regardless of the disease status of the area of origin. The concept is in line with the food safety standards set by the *Codex Alimentarius* of FAO/WHO, which focus only on the safety to human health of the actual traded product. However, in order to protect animal health, another set of standards is applied to livestock commodities, drawn up by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). These recommend that the area of origin of animals from which products not exposed to high temperatures for long periods during processing are derived should be free of trade-sensitive diseases, although bilateral trade based on risk analysis is possible. Recognising that the establishment and maintenance of, for example, foot and mouth disease (FMD) free zones is not achievable for many developing countries, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa, CBT has been proposed as a viable alternative.

Commodities for which scientific data exist to support certification of safety in terms of relevant diseases should be accepted as safe regardless of their area of origin. For example, ample evidence can be presented to show that de-boned, matured beef from which the glands have been removed presents no more than an acceptable level of risk, because any FMD virus that may accidentally be present at slaughter would be destroyed by the low pH reached during maturation.

Does CBT imply that meat from animals with FMD can be traded?

While matured, de-boned and de-glanded beef from animals infected with FMD would not be able to transmit the virus, it must comply with the general food safety requirement that meat should be derived from healthy animals. Consumers therefore need have no fear that acceptance of CBT would result in their eating meat from sick animals! CBT simply offers the necessary assurance that, in the unlikely event of an apparently healthy animal with no clinical signs or lesions of FMD nevertheless harbouring the virus, e.g. in the early incubation phase of the disease, that virus would nevertheless not be present in the traded meat.

Is CBT widely accepted as an alternative to geographical freedom with or without vaccination?

Although comparatively new, the concept has gained wide acceptance among countries and international organisations wanting to use trade in livestock commodities in the war against poverty. CBT has been embraced in principle by the OIE, but the current recommendation is that the commodity should originate in a free zone, thus effectively

maintaining the *status quo*. The COMESA Council of Ministers has accepted the principle of CBT and, by applying it to trade in livestock commodities within COMESA, can set an example that will encourage wider acceptance. Member countries can play an important role within the Africa Commission and General Session of the OIE to press for the requirement for geographical freedom of area of origin to be dropped when CBT is applied. It will also be important to identify other suitable commodities/products for which data regarding safety from trade-sensitive animal diseases exist or should be generated.

Will CBT reduce the status of the veterinary services?

The application of CBT is likely to enhance the status of the veterinary services. They have a vital role to play in maintaining a healthy livestock industry by monitoring animal health, preventing disease, intervening in the event of an animal health crisis, carrying out pre-slaughter inspection and maintaining a data base of disease information to support certification for trade. If as expected CBT opens the way for more and higher value trade, this will not change, but the need for sufficient animals of good quality will provide new opportunities in terms of improving nutrition and reproduction, and will ultimately create opportunities for greater privatisation of

veterinary services.

How can the COMESA Green Pass support CBT?

One of the most important requirements for CBT to work is credible certification, which is the main purpose of the COMESA Green Pass. Currently, certification for livestock commodities is provided by the state veterinary authorities, based on the disease status of the area of origin, and is unfortunately not always accepted as credible by trading partners, who prefer to carry out their own inspections. Certification for commodities that have been subjected to some process to render them safe may require additional expertise not available in official veterinary services. The proposed National Green Pass Authority will have the opportunity to make use of such expertise to enhance the credibility of the certificates that it provides, which will naturally also include the assurance by an examining veterinarian that the animals from which the commodity was derived were healthy. Most importantly, the fact that the national authorities will be monitored and evaluated by a Regional Green Pass Authority will greatly increase credibility of the Green Pass in the eyes of importers, as the regional authority will be serving regional interests, which must not be jeopardized by an oversight at national level.

Further reading

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Further information

Please contact Dr. Sam Kanyarukiga, CAADP Coordinator, email: skanyarukiga@comesa.int